

CREATIVE WRITING

AUTUMN 2006

ENG. 232 & 332 COURSE SYLLABUS
MONDAYS & FRIDAYS
Room: Bower Family Center 301 (1-2:15)
Room: Alt Building 606 (2:30-3:45)
Office: Alt Building 107
Credits: 3.0
Office hours by appointment
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P. G. Weston
1964

REQUIRED TEXTS: (available at the College's bookstore)
The Angel Hair Anthology, edited by Anne Waldman and Lewis Warsh.
The Teachers & Writers Handbook of Poetic Forms, edited by Ron Padgett.
I Remember, by Joe Brainard.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

An 'Image' is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time.
— Ezra Pound

All forms of writing are images, but not all images are forms of writing. Or are they? This creative writing workshop will explore the relationships between language, images and the experience of making meaning. How do we, as poets, playwrights, fiction, and prose writers create images with words? In turn, how can we use images to prompt and explore our own writing? We will creatively blur common distinctions between words and images in order to begin writing the books we want to read.

We will consider creative writing's unique roll as a language construct and art form. Our ongoing task as writers is to absorb a gamut of formal devices available to us as we strive to liberate language from banality. We will study strategies for asking old (but necessary) questions about place, identity, life, death, perception, etc. in new ways (Pound also challenged writers of his generation to "make it new").

Everyone knows that the best way to develop as a writer is to read and write constantly — how you choose to go about it is another matter. You will become familiar with the terminology associated with creative writing as we read and discuss literary and visual art, and you will improve as a writer as you receive feedback from myself, your peers, and our dazzling array of visiting writers. That said, we will also have fun in this class. Although writing and reading is hard work, if it weren't enjoyable, why would we do it?

COURSE REQUIREMENTS: You must meet *all* the requirements in order to pass this class.

Preparedness: Students must come prepared for class. You should bring both your books and your peers' manuscripts with comments. Please buy a folder and computer disk to store all of your work.

Participation: Because this is a workshop, participation is of the utmost importance. By definition, a workshop cannot work without every member participating in the discussion of both the outside readings and your peers' writing.

Attendance: You must attend class. On the 4th absence, you will fail this course. If you have an emergency or a medical problem that permits you from attending class, you must call or e-mail me before class begins. Roll will be taken five minutes into class. You're welcome to sit in if you are late, but you will be marked absent.

Reading: It is your responsibility to read and annotate all assigned texts. Be sure to look up words you don't know, take note of various poetic techniques, and jot down questions or observations that you would like to share. This will prepare you to participate in class discussions, and make you aware of strategies you can use in your own writing. When we have a visiting writer, please type and print your questions and comments ahead of time, and mark up whatever texts they assign. It is important for them to feel welcome and comfortable as our guests.

Writing: Obviously, we will be doing a lot of writing in this course. We will be experimenting with different forms, subjects, and techniques. Some of the exercises will prompt wonderful writing, whereas you may find others less fruitful. This will depend on your own strengths and interests. Remember that your ability to articulate why you like or dislike something is actually much more important than simple praise or bland dismissal.

All assignments need to be typed unless there is an aesthetic purpose for doing otherwise. Keep them all in a folder of your choice and number each draft with the date of the revision in the upper right-hand corner. All work submitted for workshops must be new work. In other words, I will not accept projects written before this semester. The idea is that the more you write, the better you will write, so use this opportunity to produce *new work*. You will be expected to begin a new project every week and revise on a regular basis.

The Workshop: We will work in small circular groups and as a class. In both cases, you need to read your peers' work as carefully as possible so that we can help each other become better writers. You are to offer up any comments you feel are pertinent to the discussion during the workshop. Please show respect for your peers' efforts by addressing the manuscript and not the author when suggesting revision. At the same time, please be rigorous in your critiques by avoiding general comments such as "I like this line" or "I don't like the end of the poem." Rather, discuss what is successful about a particular line, or make suggestions that might help your peer writer improve (or at least think differently) about the end of the poem. Once we have finished with a draft, you are to make sure your name is on it, and then pass it to the author who will keep it in his or her manuscript. This way, when I am giving final grades, I can read your comments and give you credit for this aspect of the class. This also gives your peers the opportunity to reread your comments and take them into consideration. While your work is being discussed, please refrain from commenting on your own work. If there is something special the reader needs to know, you may write a preface and distribute it with the primary body of work. Your work must stand on its own, so commenting on it before the class has finished discussing it is not helpful.

In addition to our regular sessions, the workshop will host a series of visits from professional literary artists. Each will choose a few pages of their own work for you to read prior to class. In turn, they will read and respond to your work, either by asking you to prepare a piece prior to the workshop, or by giving you an assignment about halfway through their visit.

Final Portfolio: Your final portfolio should be 12-16 pages, plus a 2 page critical introduction that discusses your concepts and ideas. I will give you specific formatting instructions mid-semester.

Book Review: You will be expected to find a current book by one of the writers affiliated with the workshop that appeals to you. You will read and annotate the book carefully and then write a review. In general, reviews are aimed at an audience that has not yet read the book; thus it should discuss the larger project, examine a representative work, and consider the successes and failures of the book. Remember that a review is not a summary. Please make 15 copies of the review in its final form so that I can compile a review packet for the class.

Reading Response: You will need to attend one reading of your choice and write a response to the reading (this could be combined with the Book Review). Do not merely summarize; rather use this as an opportunity to recognize reading techniques with reference to the oral and musical qualities of the

performance. You can learn a lot about how to read aloud from listening to others and become part of Buffalo's distinguished literary tradition. I will make regular announcements about readings. Extra credit will be given to students who write multiple Reading Responses and Book Reviews.

Useful Links:

AddAll <<http://used.addall.com>>: Best on-line source for used and rare books.
Electronic Book Review <www.electronicbookreview.com>: Find out what's hot off the press.
Modern American Poetry <www.english.uiuc.edu/maps>: An extensive on-line encyclopedia.
Small Press Distribution <www.spdbooks.org>: First stop for books in print.
UBU Web <www.ubu.com>: Films, audio, visual, and conceptual works—wander and wonder...
Penn Sound <www.writing.upenn.edu/pennsound>: An extensive audio/visual poetry archive.

Artistic Centers in Buffalo:

Albright Knox Gallery <www.albrightknox.org>: Contemporary art museum—free Friday night!
Buffalo Film Seminars <<http://csac.buffalo.edu/bfsfall2006.html>>: Great film series downtown.
Exhibit X Fiction Series <www.english.buffalo.edu/exhibitx>: Terrific fiction reading series.
Hallwalls <www.hallwalls.org>: Beautifully remodeled contemporary arts center downtown.
Just Buffalo <www.justbuffalo.org/index.shtml>: Subscribe to their announcement list for news.
Literary Buffalo <www.literarybuffalo.com>: The master calendar of literary events in Buffalo.
Poetics Plus <www.nacip.net/spring6.htm>: Poetry and poetics events at UB.

Grading:

Writing assignments (assigned exercises and workshop writing) will be graded on a +/- system. However, the Portfolio, Reading Response, Book Review, and Participation will be graded on an A-F scale.

Final Portfolio	30%
Writing Assignments	30%
Class Preparation and Participation	20%
Reading Response	10%
Book Review	10%

FALL SEMESTER 2006
MONDAYS & FRIDAYS

Week 1

M 8.28
F 9.1

Classes begin. Introductions. Survey. First Assignment.

Week 2

M 9.4
F 9.8

Labor Day Observed

- **Poetics Plus** Group Reading at Rust Belt Books @ 8 pm.

Week 3

M 9.11
F 9.15

- **Susan Howe** reads Sunday September 17th @ 2 pm Burchfield Penney.

Week 4

M 9.18
F 9.22

Visiting Writer: Sarah Campbell is a writer, sound artist, and scholar. She hosts and produces a bi-monthly literary arts radio show on WBFO-FM 88.7 and edits the journal *P-Queue*, which publishes hybrid and innovative poetry and prose.

Week 5

M 9.25
F 9.29

Visiting Writer: Gregg Biglieri was born in San Francisco on October 17, 1960. He is the author of five chapbooks, as well as *Sleepy with Democracy* (Cuneiform Press, 2006). He currently lives in Buffalo, where he is finishing a dissertation on Louis Zukofsky's *Bottom: On Shakespeare* in the English Department at Temple University.

Week 6

M 10.2
F 10.6

Visiting Writer: Geoffrey Gatza is a poet and the editor of BlazeVox. His most recent collection is entitled *I Wear a Figleaf Over my Penis*.

Week 7

M 10.9

Columbus Day/Canadian Thanksgiving (no class).

- **On Words:** A Conference on the Life and Work of Robert Creeley October 12th-14th.

F 10.13

Week 8

M 10.16
F 10.20

Reading Response Due

Visiting Writer: Zack Finch is a poet and scholar who currently teaches at Dartmouth College and is a presidential fellow in the English Department at SUNY Buffalo.

Week 9

M 10.23
F 10.27

Book Review Due

Visiting Writer: Michael Kelleher lives in Buffalo, NY where he works as the Artistic Director for Just Buffalo Literary Center and edits the artist book/poet's press ELEVATOR. He has published four chapbooks, most recently, *To Be Sung* (Blazevox, 2004).

Week 10

M 10.30
F 11.3

Visiting Writer: Ethan Paquin's latest books include *The Violence* and *Accumulus*. He is the editor of the international poetry journal *Slope* (www.slope.org) and Slope Editions. He directs the Creative Writing Program at Medaille College in Buffalo, New York.

- Last day to withdraw without academic penalty.
- Aaron Shurin & Susan Gevirtz read at Big Orbit at 7pm.

Week 11

M 11.6

F 11.10

Visiting Writer: Dan Shanahan is a playwright, director and founder of Buffalo's renown independent Torn Space Theatre. We will see his production of "Cleansed" by Sarah Kane (or read the play if you can't make it to the performance).

- Laura Mullen reads at Rust Belt Books at 8pm.

Week 12

M 11.13

First Draft of 2 page critical introduction due.

- **Dale Smith** will read at 2&4 pm in the Poetry Collection at UB on November 13th.

F 11.17

Visiting Writer: Michael Basinski is a poet, scholar, performance and visual artist and the Curator of the Poetry Collection of the University Libraries, SUNY at Buffalo. He has published dozens of books and performed with various ensembles for decades.

Week 13

M 11.20

Individual Conferences.

F 11.24

Thanksgiving Holiday (no class)

Week 14

M 11.27

Portfolio Revision Workshop. 2 page critical introduction due.

F 12.1

Portfolio Revision Workshop.

Week 15

M 12.4

Portfolio Revision Workshop.

F 12.8

Last Class. Group reading, book exchange, refreshments. Portfolio due.

SURVEY QUESTIONS:

A) Who are some of the poets, playwrights, essayists and fiction writers you admire. Which works in particular? Do you see any relationship between them?

B) What makes a great work of literature great? What should it do?

C) What other forms of art are of interest to you: music; film; dance; comic books; photography; net; installation; painting; etc. Which artists and why?

D) Give a brief account of your history as a writer. Have you taken a creative writing or literature class before? What did you enjoy?

E) What do you hope to learn this semester, and how do you imagine that your short-term goals might play a role in your future—directly or indirectly?